

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #2593/01 1092012
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 192012Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4168
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7492
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8901
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR LIMA 4963
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 0199
RUEHQH/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5593
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3929
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHOND/DIRONDPC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS BOGOTA 002593

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KJUS PGOV PINR PREL PTER CO
SUBJECT: Uribe calls Petro's para-politics debate on
Antioquia a slander

REF: BOGOTA 2529

Summary

¶1. (SBU) President Uribe called leading opposition Polo Democratico Senator Gustavo Petro's accusations during the para-politics debate in congress on Antioquia department a personal slander. The nine-hour debate on April 17--in which Petro spoke for over two-hours--focused primarily on allegations against Uribe, his family, and his allies. Several pro-Uribe congresspersons and two Ministers countered Petro's claims during the debate. Most of Petro's allegations have been aired previously, and he did not present any hard evidence tying Uribe to paramilitary crimes.

End Summary.

Uribe Fights Back Petro's Allegations

¶2. (SBU) President Uribe defended himself against leading opposition Polo Democratico Senator Gustavo Petro's allegations that he aided the rise of far-right death squads when he was governor of Antioquia from 1995-97, calling the accusations a "slander." In a speech in Cartagena, Uribe said, "To be a mediocre guerrilla and such a lucid slanderer speaks very poorly of the character of the guerrilla," referring to Petro's time in the former leftist rebel group M-19. Uribe has repeatedly denied any connection between his family and the paramilitaries, insisting that he has spent his life fighting all illegal armed groups.

Petro Shifts the Para-Politics Focus on Antioquia

¶3. (SBU) Petro turned the much-awaited congressional debate on para-politics in Antioquia into an attack on President Uribe and his family. Speaking for over two-hours, he focused his speech on allegations linking Uribe and his family to paramilitary activities in Antioquia. These included claims that farms owned by Uribe's family were used

by paramilitaries for meetings and, at least in one case, for executions, and that Uribe had authorized the creation of two Public Self-Defense Groups (Convivirs) by two individuals, Rodrigo Perez Alzate (AKA "Julian Bolivar") and Jose Maria "Chepe" Barrerra, who later became paramilitary leaders (ref. A) (Note: The GOC's Private Security and Vigilance Superintendence issued a statement on April 18 denying Uribe authorized Julian Bolivar to head one of the Convivirs--they made no mention of Chepe Barrera.) Petro repeated his previous claim that the President's brother, Santiago, was linked to a death squad known as the "Twelve Apostles," and revealed a beeper message received by a paramilitary member days before the El Aro massacre from an unidentified person purportedly acting on behalf of then Governor Uribe.

¶5. (SBU) Petro also attacked three of Uribe's close political allies in the department. Petro accused presidential adviser Fabio Valencia Cossio of having solicited the political support of ex-para leader Ramon Isaza at a Conservative Party Convention in 1995. (Note: Ironically, Valencia, who was a political opponent at the time, led a debate in the Antioquia legislature in 1997 criticizing Governor Uribe's support for the Convivir.) He claimed Bogota Metropolitan Police General Daniel Ernesto Castiblanco met with Pablo Escobar, Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, Victor Carranza, Ramon Isaza, and AKA "Ariel Otero, and also accused General (ret.) Rito Alejo del Rio, ex-commander of the Seventeenth Brigade in Uraba, of having ties to former paramilitary leader Carlos Castano.

¶6. (SBU) At the end of the session, Petro suggested a National Peace and Reconciliation Accord. This would include

the creation of regional constituent assemblies to dismantle the clientalist political structure, land reform, and general juridical benefits to be extended to illegal armed group members in exchange for complete confessions. The following day the ex-para leaders incarcerated in Itagui issued a statement indicating they would be willing to take part in a National Peace Accord. Several Liberal Party congressmen also expressed support for such an accord.

GOC Officials Respond

¶7. (SBU) In addition to several congresspersons from Uribe's coalition parties, Minister of Interior and Justice Carlos Holguin and Transportation Minister Andres Uriel countered Petro's allegations during the debate. Holguin described Petro's intervention as "an epic tale" based on a fictional story. Holguin accused Petro of using fragmented bits and pieces of judicial proceedings to serve his own purpose. He also asked why Petro was not so aggressive about unearthing links between politicians and leftist guerrillas. Uriel, who is from Antioquia, defended Uribe as an honest person with nothing to hide.

Presidential Politics?

¶8. (U) The leading Medellin daily El Colombiano said on April 19 that Petro's presentation marked both a "finish line" and a "starting point." It was the culmination of the senator's efforts to delegitimize President Uribe, his family, his government, his collaborators, and Antioquia. At the same time, the proposal of a National Peace Accord was the kick-off of his presidential aspirations as a candidate for the Polo Democratico Party.

Drucker